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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 002132

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#), [KPAO](#), [OPRC](#), [OIIP](#), [KWWW](#), [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: IRAQ: MOTHER OF ALL PUBLIC DIPLOMACY BATTLES

REF: A. A) AMMAN 01949

[B. B\) AMMAN 02032](#)

[C. C\) SECSTATE 81949](#)

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[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary. Post has continuously taken stock of where we are in the public diplomacy struggle, what we are doing about public opinion, and what more we can do to counter the deep anger and resume a productive dialogue in support of U.S. goals towards the region. In Jordan a profound distrust of the U.S. characterizes the reactions of people at all levels of society. We are using a number of tools to deal with this challenge, but we believe there are steps that the USG and others can and must take both in the final stages of the war and in its immediate aftermath, to heal the wounds and to restore America's political credibility. Most essential and convincing is for Jordanians to hear the truth from the Iraqis themselves. End Summary

The Ugliest of Moods

[1](#)2. (SBU) During the past week two themes have dominated the Jordanian media: graphic pictures of civilian casualties, especially children, plus stories about heroic Iraqi resistance, usually accepting the Iraqi regime's version of events. Editorialists take a similar line, repeating the mantra about U.S. desire for hegemony and oil, with Syria and Iran as the next targets of American military aggression. The Secretary's statement that there is no list of countries against whom the U.S. contemplates military action was extremely helpful, and more such previews of U.S. long-term intentions for the region would help chip away at Jordanian skepticism. The media are playing to the prevailing mood among Jordanians of every stripe, who attach little credibility to the U.S. case that we are waging the war to eliminate WMD and liberate the Iraqi people. &You are making Saddam into a hero, is the common cry from even those educated Jordanians who are fully aware of his record of atrocities. People believe, because they want to believe, that the U.S. is deliberately targeting residential areas and destroying Iraq's infrastructure out of frustration that, as Jordanians see it, the Iraqi people have not greeted coalition troops as liberators. They dismiss statements to the contrary, especially those carried by CNN and other Western media, which have lost credibility precisely because they fail to confirm the popular myths about U.S. brutality and Iraqi resistance. &For the first time in 50 years of Middle East conflict I have stopped listening to Western news, said an affluent, Western-educated doctor.

Mission's Response: Tough Sledding But Essential

[1](#)3. (SBU) The Mission has taken on this challenge in a number of ways. Just before the war the Ambassador gave an interview to Petra, the national news agency, underlining the U.S. determination to enforce U.N. Resolutions vis a vis Iraq. Following the outbreak of hostilities at a stake-out at the April 3 meeting with the Prime Minister, the Ambassador stressed U.S. compassion for the Iraqi people, our deep sorrow over civilian casualties and our efforts to avoid them despite the Saddam regime's strategy of putting civilians in harm's way. He also stressed the role that Jordan and the U.S. will play together in rebuilding Iraq after its liberation. At the same time, he made it clear that the U.S. is determined to achieve our goals in removing the Iraqi regime and the threat it poses. Similarly, Public Affairs has sponsored numerous DVDs and Global Exchange dialogues between USG officials such as Andrew Natsios and Ambassador Chris Ross with Jordanian journalists; we have arranged briefings by the DART team on humanitarian assistance and trips to warehouses full of aid for Iraq for the Arab and Western media; we have targeted faxes and e-mails countering disinformation plus special IIP photos and reports to the local news media, in addition to redesigning our webpage to focus on Iraq; and we are calling on editors to insist on some objectivity into the war coverage. For the longer term, Embassy officers from all sections continue to carry on the vital work of helping Jordan to weather the war economically, and finding ways to make sure Jordanians know what we are doing in our shared interests.

What We Need: Iraqi Voices Above All and Assurances about the post-war U.S. Role

14. (SBU) In the end, we believe, the most effective means of turning around Jordanian opinion will be the voices of liberated Iraqis themselves reminding that a) Saddam,s degree of suppression and cruelty was in a class by itself b) Saddam,s henchmen were responsible for many if not most of the civilian casualties and c) how good it feels to be rid of the Regime. The other message is that the peace with the coalition forces was an honorable one for the ordinary soldiers as opposed to Saddam's suicide or death squads. We should be prepared to accept that many Iraqis chose to fight despite their detestation of the regime and we should acknowledge their courage in doing so. Now, however, Iraqis are determined to rebuild and to work constructively with the U.S. and other countries to recover from the decades of misrule. We will need stories which objectively emphasize that a) a massive humanitarian and reconstruction effort is being undertaken and b) Iraqis are looking forward to a future of dignity and growth. We will also need Iraqi administrators to stress that the coalition is giving them maximum authority and leeway to run their own affairs and that the U.S. military government is there to maintain order not one second longer than it is needed.

15. (C) Finally, here in Jordan, and throughout the Arab world, we believe, it will be essential to restore U.S. credibility by moving forward towards an equitable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Although many Jordanians dismissed the President,s announcement of the imminent presentation of the Road Map, they will be scrutinizing our actions to see our next steps in this area. The media has implicitly and overtly compared U.S. actions in Iraqi cities to those of Israeli forces in the occupied territories. It will be critical for the U.S. to put our full weight behind the Roadmap -- particularly in the form of U.S. statements seen as pressing Israel to take concrete steps -- and to act on our opposition to settlement activity, home demolitions and humiliation of Palestinian civilians, if Jordanians are to see us as a force for peace rather than a new imperium.

GNEHM